

VZCZCXYZ0004
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUL #2861/01 2610643
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 180643Z SEP 07
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6631
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3144
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3281
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUALSFJ/COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA AB JA
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J2 SEOUL KOR
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA SCJS SEOUL KOR
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC//OSD/ISA/EAP//

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 002861

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/10/2014
TAGS: [KN](#) [KS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#)
SUBJECT: LEE WINS PRIMARY, WHAT NEXT?

Classified By: POL Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Conservative Grand National Party (GNP) presidential candidate Lee Myung-bak has started to revamp the party just three months ahead of the presidential election. After emerging as the GNP candidate on August 20, Lee stated that he would embrace Park Geun-hye's supporters. However, the recent formation of his election preparation team may reveal his preference for loyalty over mending party factions. His inclination to rely on his experience as a former CEO and disinterest in reconciliation with runner-up Park Geun-hye could turn out to be a weakness on the campaign trail. Advisors to Lee during recent meetings with poloffs explained some of the changes taking place in the party as it transitions from its pre-primary mission to putting candidate Lee into the Blue House. End Summary

LEE AS PARTY CEO

¶2. (C) Lee's nomination as the GNP's candidate on August 20 has given him de facto status as the party's presiding officer. In a meeting with poloffs on September 13, Lee advisor Dr. Yim Sung-bin affirmed that Lee was trying to change the party's traditional structure to something that more closely resembled Hyundai Construction, where Lee was CEO. Lee handpicked loyal lawmaker Chung Doo-un to act as Lee's campaign preparation team leader, but is said to have let Chung pick "his men" for the positions announced September 7. In a break from the past, all other senior party officials and lawmakers have been excluded from the team, which local press is calling "super lightweight" because it is made up of only working level staff. The team consists solely of Lee supporters, mainly younger experts from the business and media sectors as well as from academia, mostly Lee's alma mater Korea University.

¶3. (C) Lee's emphasis on ability and efficiency is apparently part of his goal to streamline party leadership while strengthening regional and local chapters. Yim highlighted Lee's pragmatism, yet at the same time, expressed uncertainty as to whether or not Lee possessed a grand vision or driving ideology. Yim reasoned that because Lee was so goal-oriented, Lee would fulfill campaign pledges to build a grand canal and create a science hub south of Daejeon. Finally, Yim speculated that Lee may decide to run the rest of his campaign as he did Hyundai, by creating two separate teams of advisors and making them compete against each other.

14. (C) The nomination of Lee as the party's candidate has not signaled the end of clashes between Lee and rival Park Geun-hye, nor the beginning of party unity. Appointing positions within Lee's campaign team and the party are serving as fodder for new battles between the two. Lee has yet to name the core members of his campaign headquarters. This will likely happen in early October. Yim said that Lee is awaiting the results of a study which will rank the performance of National Assembly members' efforts to garner votes during the primary at the local level before assigning anyone to his campaign headquarters. Only members who had performed well would have a place in his camp, broaching the possibility that Lee would not rely heavily on the party, or loyal Park lawmakers, for support.

15. (C) Yim claimed that Lee was "waiting until the dust settles and for Park supporters to repent," which could explain why Lee has not made more of an effort to embrace those who worked for Park. Political analyst Park Song-min told poloffs that "Lee's heart wasn't into reconciliation with Park," and that he was making statements to the contrary to retain Park's voters.

16. (C) Another recent skirmish with Park has been over control of local chapters in the party. Yim commented that this was the first time the person with lower internal party support had won the primary. In an effort to shore up his internal support, Lee has proposed that his aides and supporters head local chapters of the party, to which Park has objected. Park insists that they compete with her people in elections to take place September 18-21. Since these positions have great power over the nomination process for the April 2008 National Assembly elections, it is natural for there to be competition. In past instances, the competing candidates came to an agreement on who would represent the district without having to go to a vote.

Reaching Out

17. (C) Yim and other working level Lee advisors told poloff that Lee hoped to broaden the party's base by bringing in people from outside the GNP. Lee is reportedly reaching out to prominent individuals including former Seoul National University president Chung Un-chan, former Prime Minister Goh Kun, and former Korea University president Euh Yoon-dae. National Assembly member Yoo Jay-kun, from the liberal United New Democratic Party, told poloffs on September 10 that he was approached by Lee's camp and offered the position of Speaker of the National Assembly if he came over to the GNP. Lee hopes also to get backing from minor parties that represent important regions of the country such as the People's First Party (that controls the key Choongcheong region) and the Democratic Party (the leading political power in the Jeolla Provinces.) Lee's recent visits to those provinces underscore his efforts there.

18. (C) Lastly, Lee is extending an open hand to NGOs and religious groups. The 2007 People's Alliance for Victory is set to launch September 19 and is headed by Reverend Kim Jin-hong, who supports Lee. The alliance will be comprised of 300 conservative NGOs including the politically motivated "New Right" NGOs. Although Lee has a strong Christian following, he is reaching out to Buddhists through his older brother Lee Sang-deuk, who is the National Assembly's vice speaker. Poloffs happened to be in Lee Sang-deuk's office when a Buddhist delegation stopped by, apparently confirming efforts to reach out to other faiths. During the primary, Lee relied on Buddhist lawmaker Ju Ho-young to rally support among Buddhists.

19. (C) With all of the changes taking place within the party, the party's power structure appears to be changing as well. According to Yim, party members have not been proactive in their efforts to help Lee, but have, "just been waiting around," because they are not sure who to take direction from. The party's senior membership is composed of people well into their sixties while Lee's camp is made up of those in their forties. The selection of younger people to fill party positions will likely aid reform within the party, regardless of the outcome of the election, for years to come. As a result, the party's former chairwoman Park Geun-hye is becoming somewhat marginalized because of the changes taking place in the party's power structure, and that is likely energizing her efforts to maintain control.

Comment

10. (C) Although Lee's business savvy is unquestioned, he will need to prove his political proficiency to keep the GNP train on track. He has surrounded himself with a number of political experts and probably knows that he will have to compromise with Park and select a certain number of her people to positions of power. Lee is undoubtedly aware that he needs Park's staunch conservative supporters, as well as her strength in the Gyeongsang Provinces, in order to win in December.
VERSHBOW